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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness and replicability of staff training programs provided by the Northern New England Social Action Theater (NNESAT), whose touring component travels around the country promoting the use of improvisational theater as a means of training all levels of literacy practitioners. Questionnaires were administered at 13 NNESAT scenario presentations to some 700 adult basic education (ABE) practitioners in 8 cities and 5 improvisational workshops attended by approximately 100 trainees. Nearly all participants in the scenario presentations and improvisational workshops were interested in and pleased with the literacy training provided by the NNESAT. The troupe was praised for tailoring the issues and messages presented to specific communities/audiences, stimulating and managing audience participation, and conveying new information and skills to trainees. It was concluded that the NNESAT training program is indeed useful and replicable but could be improved by focusing on how training applies to ABE administration/teaching and student learning, providing more direction to scenario discussions, expanding the "nuts-and-bolts" training provided, and making sure participants' expectations of training sessions are accurate. (Seventeen tables/figures are included. Appended are the study questionnaires, survey administration instructions, and a list of performance sites/dates included in the evaluation.) (MN)

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Evaluation Report

The Northern New England Social Action Theater

Literacy Theater Staff Training Project: An Evaluation

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Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801

November 15, 1993

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Evaluation Report

The Northern New England Social Action Theater

Literacy Theater Staff Training Project: An Evaluation

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I. Introduction

Northern New England Social Action Theater: An Overview

Purposes of the Evaluation

Evaluation Methods

Organization of Findings

I. INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the evaluation of training programs provided by the Northern New England Social Action Theater under funding by the National Institute for Literacy. RMC Research conducted the summative evaluation between March 1 and October 30, 1993.

In providing feedback to the Northern New England Social Action Theater about the effectiveness of its activities and recommendations for future program development and improvement, this study also provides important insights on the use of improvisational theater in expanding educators' awareness of critical issues in adult basic education, promoting improved instructional and administrative practices, developing better communication skills, and fostering deeper understandings of social change and the problems prevalent among ABE clients.

Northern New England Social Action Theater: An Overview

The idea for a literacy theater emerged in 1984 at a conference for adult educators who were seeking ways to widen the scope of adult literacy. Since its first performance in Montreal at the 1985 national conference of the Commission on Adult Basic Education, the Northern New England Social Action Theater has been stretching the dimensions of conventional training models by challenging adult educators and program administrators to examine their own practices and beliefs, broadening their conceptual understandings of adult learning, and increasing their skills in dealing with major social issues that impact their students' day-to-day lives.

The first theater group of its kind in the nation, the Northern New England Social Action Theater's touring component travels the country promoting the use of improvisational theater as a means to train all levels of literacy practitioners. Federally funded for the last seven years by Library Literacy Title VI and this year by a new grant from the National Institute for Literacy, the group's efforts have resulted in spinoff literacy theater projects in at least 10 other states.

The touring component—which consists of adult educators from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont—produces two types of programs: (1) awareness scenarios, and (2) improvisational training workshops.

Awareness scenarios focus on real-life situations that can inhibit adult students' progress in the classroom, decrease their motivation, or ultimately result in their dropping out of ABE programs. The 5- to 10-minute scenario performances provide an arena in which practitioners can get in touch with some of the problems prevalent outside the classroom that affect students' learning and behaviors.

Each scenario performance is followed by a feedback session in which a facilitator helps the audience interact with the actors, who remain in character throughout the discussion. The process of questioning the actors is intended to stimulate debate, critical analysis of conventional ABE practices and policies, and self-reflection. By means of the discussion process, the facilitator attempts to target often-ignored underlying issues (e.g., stereotyping, assumptions, and biases) and promote interaction among audience members in a manner that encourages personal examination and articulation of values, separates fact from opinion, and surfaces responsible choices.

The 4-hour improvisational training workshops are considered the "follow-up" to the scenario presentations and generally intended to equip participants with the ability to use scenarios and interactive discussions in their own work. The workshops focus on actively engaging trainees in participatory activities aimed at enhancing verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, and physical self-expression. Because this "loosening up" and open communication is important to the success of improvisational theater, the training activities are designed to stimulate participants' emotions and non-verbal expressive modes (such as movement and gesture) and to allow participants to "play" freely with their imaginations. Key to the success of this interactive, participatory learning experience is the facilitator, who models open communication, encourages participants to play and interact, provides the kinds of activities that

promote interaction and non-verbal communication, and gives participants feedback and encouragement in a non-threatening way.

Purposes of This Evaluation

The purposes of this evaluation were as follows:

(1) To determine how interesting and engaging ABE practitioners found the scenario presentations and improvisational workshops to be as a training/staff development mechanism.

(2) To obtain practitioners' feedback about the importance and relevance of the issues presented in the scenario presentations, as well as their suggestions for future topics.

(3) To explore how effective the scenario presentations and improvisational workshops were in meeting their intended goals—i.e., in heightening ABE practitioners' awareness of social issues that impact on adult students' learning (scenarios), developing participants' skills to apply/adapt improvisational theater techniques to their own work environments (workshops), and providing a positive forum for the critical examination of one's own feelings, assumptions, attitudes, etc. (both the scenarios and workshops).

(4) To explore the perceived usefulness of this training approach on the participants' future professional behaviors.

Evaluation Methods

Questionnaires were administered at all performances of the Northern New England Social Action Theater funded under the National Institute for Literacy grant between March 12 and August 24, 1993. (See Exhibit 1.) This included scenario presentations to some 700 adult education practitioners during 13 training days/events that occurred in eight different sites across the country, as well as five offerings of the improvisational workshop, which were attended by a total of approximately 100 trainees. Training sites were as follows: Minneapolis, Minnesota; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Sturbridge, Massachusetts; New Orleans, Louisiana; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Knoxville, Tennessee; San Francisco, California; and Fall River, Massachusetts.

EXHIBIT 1. Social Action Theater Presentations by Site

SITES → / SCENARIOS ↓	MN 1	MN 2	NM 1	NM 2	SB 1	SB 2	LA 1	LA 2	LA 3	PA 1	TN 1	SF 1	FR 1	Total Viewers
Student Intake	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	415
Domestic Violence	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			243
Sexual Harassment		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	413
AIDS		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	513
Developmental Disabilities		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓		365
Eviction	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	475
Landlord/Tenant											✓			40
Funding Issues													✓	24
Auto Repair Shop	✓						✓		✓		✓		✓	265
Student Placement									✓	✓				160
												Total		682
IMPROVISATIONAL WORKSHOPS		✓				✓				✓	✓		✓	100

✓ = Performed

Sites: Minnesota (MN); New Mexico (NM); Sturbridge, Massachusetts (SB); Louisiana (LA); Pennsylvania (PA); Tennessee (TN); San Francisco (SF); Fall River, Massachusetts (FR).

The broad research questions that guided instrument design and analyses are shown in Exhibit 2 below. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using SPSS/PC+ for all Likert-like items. As is conventional with the reporting of qualitative data, we have synthesized participants' responses, included actual quotes to illustrate opinions that reflect majority or consensus viewpoints, and pointed to outlying opinions where those seemed to be particularly insightful alternative views.

EXHIBIT 2. Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent does the Northern New England Social Action Theater focus on important and relevant issues in the field of adult literacy?
2. To what extent do the scenario performances and discussions intensify awareness of issues for participants?
3. To what extent do participants gain greater communication skills and a heightened sensitivity towards others as a result of the improvisational workshops?
4. Do participants predict changes in their professional behaviors as a result of viewing these performances and participating in discussions? If so, what kinds of changes?
5. Do participants who participated in the scenarios and workshops value these theater techniques as instructional and training tools?
6. Do participants feel that they have acquired skills necessary to use theater techniques in their own work?

Although RMC Research designed the instruments and analyzed the data, the actual administration of the questionnaires was the responsibility of the Northern New England Social Action Theater, who passed out the surveys and tried to allow participants 5-10 minutes to complete them before the end of each session. Completion/return rates for the questionnaires were 47% for the scenarios and 61% for the improvisational workshops. Given the time constraints (it was not easy to always stop a session 10 minutes before the scheduled end of the

training to give participants sufficient time to complete the surveys) and general unfamiliarity of adult education practitioners with the needs/benefits of evaluating staff development offerings, the return rates appear to reflect a reasonable effort from which valid conclusions can be drawn.

Organization of Findings

Chapter II presents the findings that pertain to the scenario presentations and interactive discussions. Chapter III presents the reactions of those ABE practitioners who also attended the improvisational workshop activities. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter IV. An Epilogue sets this study within the context of staff development for adult basic education programs nationally. The Appendices contain the two instruments used in this study, instructions to the Northern New England Social Action Theater about survey administration, and the list of performance sites that were part of this evaluation.

II. The Scenario Presentations

Importance and Relevance of Scenario Issues

Interest/Engagement in Social Action Theater as a staff Development Mechanism

Increased Awareness of Social Issues that Impact on Learning

Potential Impact on Future Behavior

General Comments/Suggestions from Trainees

II. THE SCENARIO PRESENTATIONS

As Exhibit 1 showed, at each of the sites visited by the Northern New England Social Action Theater, four or more scenarios were performed. The scenarios were unscripted, improvisational works that often changed emphasis or "story line" at different sites while nevertheless maintaining a central message. The touring group typically decided which scenarios to present and the focus/slant they would take by matching local adult education communities' problems and interests to the existing repertoire of scenarios, which are summarized in Exhibit 3 on the next page.

Trainees. Persons attending the scenarios across the eight sites were adult basic education professionals who represented all levels of expertise and job status within the field, including volunteers/tutors, classroom teachers, program coordinators, program directors, counselors, and others who volunteer or work in the field of adult basic education (e.g., consultants or university faculty). Exhibit 4 profiles the 280 trainees who responded to the scenario questionnaire item that asked about their professional background.

EXHIBIT 4. Profiles of Scenario Respondents by Job Status and Years of ABE Experience (N = 280)

Job Status	Participants' Experience					%
	≤1 Yr	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	≥11 Yrs	
Volunteer/Tutor	1	13	12	12	12	18%
Teacher	1	27	24	22	32	38%
Program Coordinator	2	2	12	11	17	16%
Program Director	-	2	7	7	21	13%
Counselor	2	2	6	-	1	4%
Other Professional	3	6	7	4	12	11%
Total Individuals	9	52	68	56	95	280
Total %	3%	19%	24%	20%	34%	100%

EXHIBIT 3. Repertoire of Scenarios

Student Intake: "All I need are two English courses"	
Focus:	An insensitive secretary performs intake with a new learning center student; the student subsequently encounters the learning center's director and teacher.
Discussion:	Staff members' insensitivity to the student's needs, the bureaucratic nature of the program, and its general unresponsiveness to the student's concerns. The audience discusses appropriate restructuring of programs and intake procedures to adequately meet student needs.
Domestic Violence: "He needs me"	
Focus:	An abusive husband's interference with a wife's tutoring session.
Discussion:	The student's home environment and her/his ability to concentrate and learn. Ideas for dealing with students' family and social issues within the context of the classroom are explored.
Sexual Harassment: "It doesn't happen here"	
Focus:	Sexual harassment in a learning center, with action centering on an abusive relationship between the director and a teacher, between two students, and between a teacher and student.
Discussion:	The use of power by the director and teacher, the responsibilities of all the characters involved, and how the organization should respond.
AIDS: "You're looking at one"	
Focus:	A class of three students and a teacher; as the scene opens, two homophobic students are arguing with their teacher about the risks of catching AIDS and are subsequently shocked by one student's revelation to the class that he is HIV-positive.
Discussion:	What the teacher should do about the HIV-positive student, class members' homophobia, and how to pick up and continue with the class lesson.
Developmental Disabilities: "This isn't my last stop"	
Focus:	A developmental disabilities advocate angrily confronts a learning center's teacher and director about the exclusion of a developmentally disabled student.
Discussion:	Explores policies for handicapped students, the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, and a variety of collaborative approaches possible for resolving this conflict.

Eviction: "Screw the word problems"	
Focus:	The frustrations of a pregnant, unmarried mother who is faced with an eviction and having trouble seeing the relevance of school in her life.
Discussion:	Centers on the tutor's insensitivity to the student's immediate concerns. The audience discusses solutions to this issue, including assisting the student in dealing with the landlord and incorporating this problem into a coping skills lesson.
Landlord/Tenant: "I own the place"	
Focus:	The eviction of two teenage women from their apartment by a verbally abusive slumlord.
Discussion:	Options the women have for addressing their concerns about the apartment (e.g., its stopped-up sink, leaky roof, light fixtures that don't work) and their responsibilities as tenants.
Funding Issues: "Here's what we are going to do"	
Focus:	When a lively learning center class hears that their funding is about to be eliminated, they become politically active and ask the director to intercede with the superintendent to get child care space at the high school. After the superintendent and school board president deny the request, the director returns to the class saying, "Here's what we are going to do...."
Discussion:	The variety of ways in which the director, teacher, and students can organize themselves in order to positively influence the superintendent and school board.
Auto Repair Shop: "I didn't know I needed this stuff"	
Focus:	A garage mechanic's desperate attempt to cover up his inability to read when offered a job promotion that requires reading skills beyond his present level.
Discussion:	Techniques commonly used in the workplace by adults with reading problems to mask/hide their problem, the constant fear of exposure they endure, and ways of encouraging such persons to enroll in an ABE class.
Student Placement: "She's (he's) my student now"	
Focus:	When a student leaves a 9-hour/week ABE class to work with a literacy tutor for 2 hours/week, the learning center director and new volunteer tutor meet and clash over who is going to teach the student.
Discussion:	Attitudes of volunteers and ABE staff, processes for collaboration, and the learning needs of students.

It is interesting to note that while the field as a whole is characterized as having a high turnover rate among tutors and part-time teachers, the sample of practitioners who responded to the scenario survey appears to be well experienced: Some 73% of the teachers and tutors have been in this field for at least 3 years. The high number of years' experience for program directors is characteristic of adult education.

Importance and Relevance of Scenario Issues

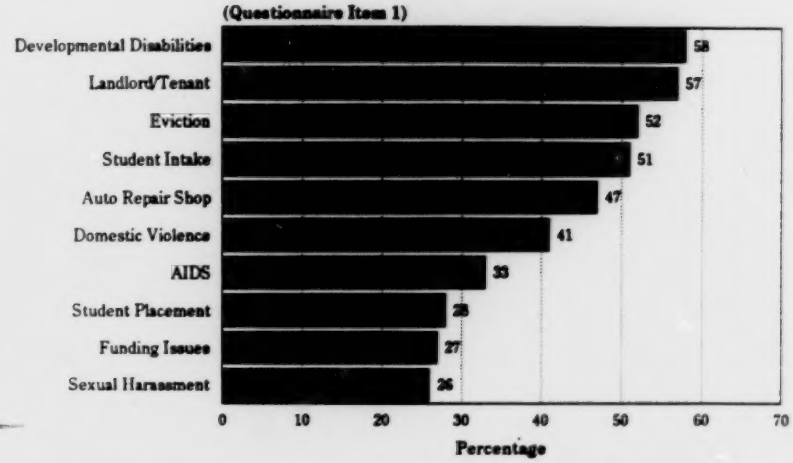
Several questionnaire items asked respondents about the importance of the issues presented in the scenarios to the field of adult basic education and the relevance of these topics to their own work with adult students. Respondents were also asked to suggest topics for future scenario development.

Item 1 asked respondents to identify, from the issues presented in the scenarios they had just seen, those that represent the most important issues in their adult basic education work. They were free to choose up to three topics, or to check off "NONE of these issues are important to my work." Exhibit 5 presents the results. (Keep in mind that varying numbers of individuals saw each scenario; "Landlord/Tenant" and "Funding Issues," for example, were only performed once and were therefore seen by relatively few individuals. Moreover, overall, only about half of those who attended the scenario presentations completed the questionnaire.)

Each of the ten scenarios in the Northern New England Social Action Theater's repertoire was judged to be one of the most important issues by at least one-fourth of the respondents who saw the particular topic performed. Five of the ten scenarios received approximately half or more of viewers' votes.

Trainees appeared to identify as important the scenarios that have immediate day-to-day relevance to their work responsibilities. For instance, the scenario "Developmental Disabilities" was selected as most important by 58% of the group who viewed it. This may be due to the fact

Exhibit 5. **Respondents' Selections of the Most Important Issues Presented in Scenarios***



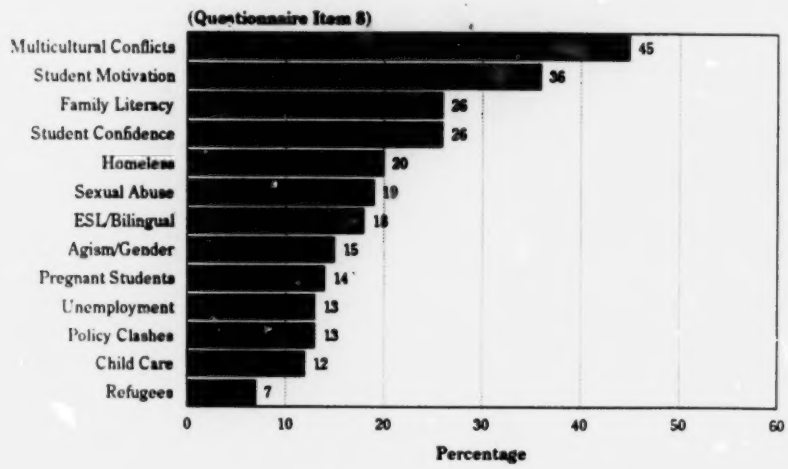
* Participants could select up to three responses. Percentages represent the proportion of participants who both saw the respective scenario and completed the questionnaire.

that the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 has had a direct impact on the delivery of educational services: Many programs are now struggling with problems associated with educating disabled adults. The other scenarios ranked highly by respondents deal with issues that directly affect how students are dealt with in ABE programs, what happens in the classroom, and students' ability to engage in the process of learning.

Significantly, not a single respondent checked the box that said "NONE of these issues are important to my work." Thus it might be concluded that, overall, the Northern New England Social Action Theater group chooses scenarios that are important to the adult education field and to practitioners' immediate problems.

Respondents were asked in Item 8 to either pick from a checklist of topics or write in a suggested topic that they felt would be important to address in a future scenario. Exhibit 6 shows the results of this question. Although fewer than 1% of the respondents wrote in their own suggestions, the topics they offered were noteworthy: e.g., Childrearing and Parenting,

Exhibit 6. **Suggestions by Respondents for Future Scenarios* (N = 321)**



* Participants could select or suggest up to three responses.

Health/Hygiene, Professional Behavior of Staff, Mandated Classes, Ageism, Retention, Transportation, GED, Welfare, Student/Student Conflicts, Classroom Violence, Turf Issues With Providers, and Teacher Job Searches.

Clearly, the Northern New England Social Action Theater has presented scenarios that include material of relevance and importance to the adult education community. Even though trainees are not able to see every scenario, the fact that the Social Action Theater troupe tailors its messages to the needs of each community where it presents most assuredly contributes not only to the affective engagement of the audience, but also to the learning value of the sessions. Many of the respondents' questionnaire comments confirm this focus on current, important issues of immediate relevance both nationally and locally:

> *"Keep showcasing the hot issues that are difficult for people to talk about."*
>
> *"This is a good way to encourage the community to look at issues that are important to the adult eduction community."*
>
> *"This is a unique approach to letting people get in touch with situations that are happening all around them."*

Interest/Engagement in Social Action Theater as a Staff Development Mechanism

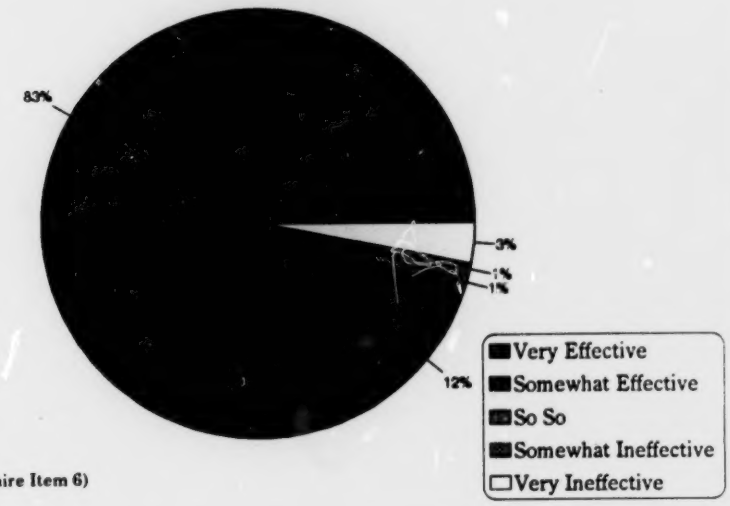
In part to determine how interesting and engaging trainees found Social Action Theater as a mechanism for staff development, the questionnaire asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of the Northern New England Social Action Theater approach in addressing serious and controversial issues in adult education and the success of the facilitator in promoting discussion.

Some 95% of the respondents indicated that the troupe was either "very effective" or "somewhat effective" in presenting serious and controversial issues. Similarly, 94% reported that the facilitator was either "very successful" or "somewhat successful" in promoting discussions related to the scenarios. (See Exhibits 7 and 8.) These are important findings, inasmuch as they confirm that not only is the Northern New England Social Action Theater successful in choosing important and relevant topics, but also the troup is presenting the topics in a way that effectively conveys the central messages in an interesting and engaging manner consistent with the high-quality delivery of staff development/training programs.

On another level, these findings are also important because they underscore the organizational capability/strength of the Northern New England Social Action Theater: Despite the unfortunate and untimely death of the company's key facilitator, Marti Stevens, early in this evaluation, the troupe continued its scheduled appearances, with members of the touring group alternating in the role of facilitator. The data showed no discernable effects from the sudden change in roles, and Social Action Theater members are quick to attribute this to Marti's excellent modeling.

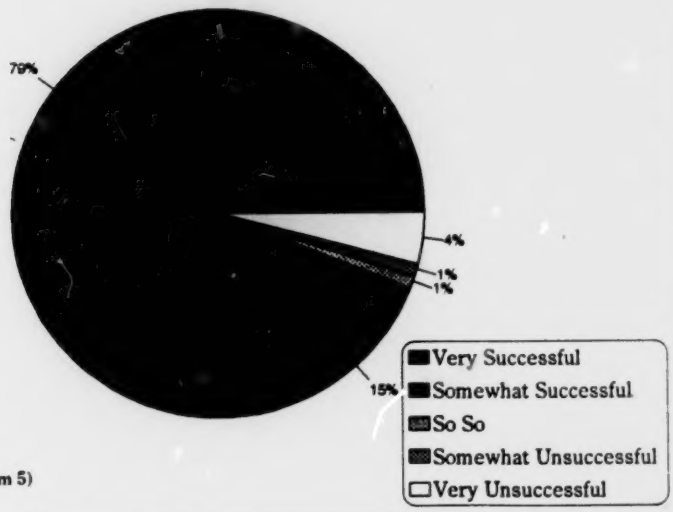
Indeed, the facilitator-led discussion that follows each scenario presentation is integral to the Social Action Theater approach; the facilitator is key to stimulating discussion, moving discussants toward important topics, leading the group to discover new approaches or solutions to their problems, and ensuring that trainees make appropriate connections between the messages of the scenarios and their everyday reality as adult educators.

Exhibit 7. **Effectiveness of the Scenarios in Dealing With Controversial Issues (N = 305)**



(Questionnaire Item 6)

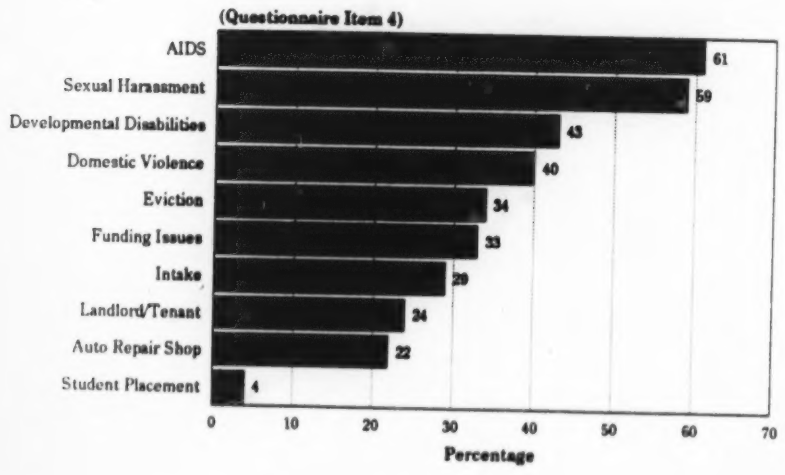
Exhibit 8. **Success of the Facilitator in Promoting Discussion Related to the Scenarios (N = 298)**



(Questionnaire Item 5)

As Exhibit 9 shows, respondents thought the discussions that followed the "AIDS" and "Sexual Harassment" scenarios generated the most informative exchanges.

Exhibit 9. **Respondents' Views on Which Scenarios Generated the Most Informative Discussion***



* Participants could select only one response.

Respondents' open-ended comments also highlighted their satisfaction with the facilitators, as the following examples demonstrate:

> *"I thought you involved the audience very effectively."*
>
> *"I thought your facilitator was superb. The facilitator really moved the action along."*
>
> *"The facilitator was effective in getting audience involvement and participation with discussion questions."*
>
> *"I enjoyed the mix of comedy and drama, as it does reflect real life. The facilitation helped me see the big picture."*

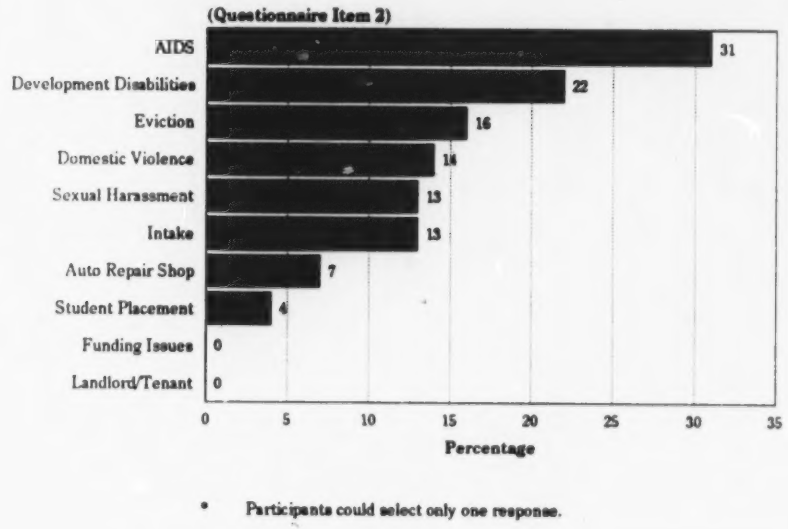
Increased Awareness of Social Issues That Impact on Learning

The questionnaire looked at more than just trainees' interest and engagement with the scenario presentations and the importance and relevance of the topics: It also collected data

pertaining to trainees' increased awareness and the overall learning value of the Social Action Theater process.

Because research suggests that adults learn best when they are intellectually challenged and emotionally engaged in the material, respondents were asked to identify the one scenario that challenged them the most "to examine their own feelings and assumptions about issues affecting students and staff in adult education." The results are shown in Exhibit 10 below.

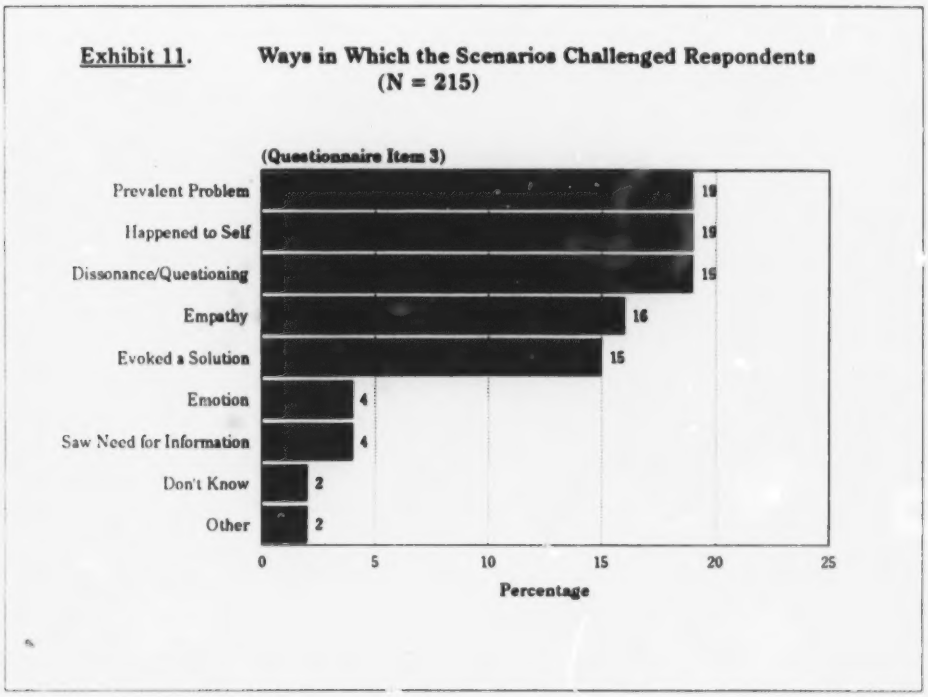
Exhibit 10. **Respondents' Views on Which Scenarios Challenged Them the Most***



* Participants could select only one response.

Because it is important in short-term training programs to engage participants at several awareness levels and to accommodate many styles of learning, this evaluation sought to capture as much detail as possible about what it was that seemed to challenge trainees. Accordingly, the questionnaire not only asked respondents to choose the most challenging scenario, but also to explain, in their own words, why the scenario challenged them. Their open-ended responses were then categorized and are displayed in Exhibit 11.

Exhibit 11. **Ways in Which the Scenarios Challenged Respondents (N = 215)**



Five reasons emerged for choosing a particular scenario as the most challenging:

(1) The scenario carried an important message or was about a particularly prevalent or high interest problem.

(2) The scenario portrayed an event with great personal significance to the respondent.

(3) The scenario created dissonance or caused respondents to question or speculate on an issue.

(4) The scenario elicited empathy for a character.

(5) The scenario evoked or hinted at a solution to a problem.

Most respondents who chose "AIDS" as the most challenging scenario felt that the actors dealt with a problem of national significance and/or that they were made more aware of an important and challenging issue through this scenario. Their comments, for example, included the following:

> *"AIDS is becoming very prevalent in our area. Raising awareness using this technique is exciting."*

"This scenario was a reminder that the issue of 'attitude' towards AIDS will be more and more prevalent and challenging as time goes on, and it will have to be dealt with on all educational levels."

"I suddenly realized that there is still a lot of misinformation about AIDS out there."

"I never thought about having to deal with AIDS in a classroom situation. It is an issue that is probably getting more prevalent. The scenario made me aware of having to learn to deal with it."

Many respondents explained that they chose a scenario as most challenging because it depicted an event of great personal significance to them or portrayed something that happened to them personally. Most of these respondents selected "Sexual Harassment" or "Developmental Disabilities" as the most challenging scenario. Some of their comments illustrate this point:

"I have experienced this [sexual harassment] personally and have dealt with my staff on this same issue several times."

"It is easy to assume that a person in this kind of situation [harassment] can make a decision to change their situation and <u>not</u> feel so stuck. I know that is not always true. I've been there. Women need to be empowered to act."

"This is a problem I can relate to because I have had a few students with learning disabilities, and it is always a challenge and a struggle for me wanting to help them but feeling limited by experience and materials, etc."

"The controversy over the disabled student's rights to an education and the teacher's responsibility to the disabled student and other students is one I have experienced. I know the student has the right and need to an education, but I am not trained to teach seriously brain damaged students."

Interestingly, many other respondents chose the same two scenarios, "Sexual Harassment" and "Developmental Disabilities," but for very different reasons: They said they were challenged because these scenarios created a sense of dissonance, left them with important unanswered questions, or stirred within them a sense of meaningful controversy. Their comments, for example, included the following:

"The rights of the handicapped vs. the rights of the other students is a challenging problem."

"The scenario created some confusion about what sexual harassment actually is. Where is the line between this and harmless touching? The scenario was most thought provoking."

"I struggle with what are 'appropriate' services and serving the developmentally disabled students to the detriment of other students."

"Who's in control of the learning agenda, the teacher or the students or the case workers? A challenging question."

For many respondents, three scenarios in particular were chosen because they elicited a sense of empathy for the characters portrayed in the scenario. These scenarios were "Domestic Violence," "Auto Repair Shop," and "Student Placement." Comments included the following:

"It made me see the student's feelings more clearly. I tend to only focus on the frustrated teacher."

"When we deal with large numbers of students, it's easy to forget how an individual student might feel."

"It was great to finally hear the 'other' side of the issue. I know that there are at least two sides to every story and this [Auto Repair Shop] was the epitome for me as far as examples go."

"I realized the way many people unconsciously and sometimes consciously destroy the self-esteem of others."

"Students come with numerous problems [Domestic Violence] that can keep them from academic success."

"We don't always see student's problems as serious as they are."

"Most times we overlook other people. We don't consider their feelings. We put things upon them without knowing or asking if they can fulfill the task."

"These scenarios helped me feel the student's and advocate's dilemma."

Finally, many respondents chose the scenarios "Auto Repair Shop" and "Student Intake" because these scenarios allowed them to begin to think about solutions to some of the problems the skits portrayed. Examples of their responses are as follows:

"It made me think about my own welcoming techniques—or sometimes the lack of them."

"I saw the need to continue to reinforce 'welcome' to any person who seeks our services."

"This was a reminder that even in the midst of a stressful day, the student should not be ignored or treated poorly."

"The initial contact in getting help is very important."

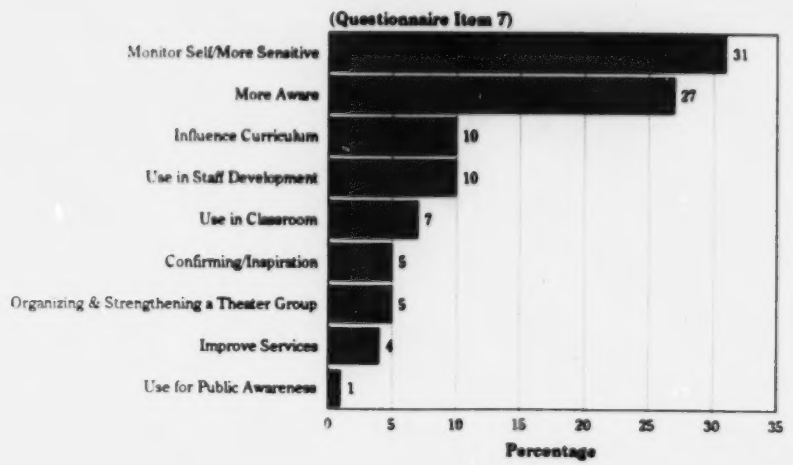
"I saw the need to gear my teaching to more functional, reality-based lessons."

"I saw the need to make sure that there is always someone there for the student, or your will lose them."

Potential Impact on Future Behavior

Since no training fulfills its mission if the trainees fail to incorporate new knowledge into their thinking or fail to incorporate new skills or behaviors in their work, this evaluation sought to determine what the perceived influence might be on the future behaviors of training participants. Questionnaire item 7 asked: "What influence, if any, will what you learned in this session have on your work in adult basic education?" Categories were created from the open-ended responses, and the results are shown in Exhibit 12. The two most frequent responses were that this experience would help participants (a) monitor their own behavior and be more sensitive to student needs, and (b) be more aware of issues that impact on student behavior.

Exhibit 12. **Respondents' Views of How the Scenarios Will Impact Their Future ABE Work (N = 168)**



General Comments/Suggestions From Trainees

Finally, the scenario questionnaire invited respondents to provide "any other comments or suggestions that might help strengthen the Social Action Theater performances." Mostly, respondents praised the group. As many as 37 respondents used the adjectives "excellent," "great," "wonderful," and "outstanding" to describe the presentations. A sample of respondents' comments follow:

> *"I realized from the scenarios that the purpose of adult education is teaching life and there are no easy answers!"*
>
> *"I saw the need to take a step back and look at the situation confronting me before jumping in. If possible, get other opinions."*
>
> *"I will try harder to incorporate some of the suggestions into my tutoring experiences. My student and I are going to limit personal conversations to coffee breaks and use our 2 hours for more constructive purposes."*
>
> *"This experience will help me look for alternatives in trying to find solutions for problems."*
>
> *"Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to look at ourselves and remind us of why we are here. Who we are working with and how we should be."*
>
> *"I was thoroughly impressed. Where can I attend the other scenarios?"*
>
> *"Excellent presentations, topics, and discussions. Although I don't teach adult literacy, but teach institutionalized youths, yet I'm aware of these issues and felt the presentations on these issues were helpful."*
>
> *"Great, <u>very thought provoking</u>."*
>
> *"You were so refreshing! Thanks a million...."*
>
> *"If you could guide the discussion toward the educational process issues, rather than the general social issues, it would be more informative from an adult ed. view. <u>Great</u> tool as is for exploring social issues!"*
>
> *"The concept is quite effective. Publicity probably would bring the group's existence to the attention of other adult basic education gatherings. Excellent."*
>
> *" I'm very pleased to see this kind of pro-active involvement in classroom community situation: This is all part of education."*
>
> *"I applaud your versatility. You each handled so many different roles in a very believable way."*

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III. The Improvisational Workshops

Heightened Sensitivity Toward Self and Others

Value Training in Improvisational Techniques

Trainee's Expectations for the Workshop

Acquisition of Skills for Utilizing Improvisational Techniques

General Comments/Suggestions from Trainees

III. THE IMPROVISATIONAL WORKSHOPS

The 4-hour improvisational workshops presented by the Northern New England Social Action Theater are aimed at actively engaging trainees in participatory activities that promote enhanced verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, and physical self-expression, as well as equipping participants with the basic improvisational theater skills necessary to enable them to train others at their worksites and thus adapt or replicate the Social Action Theater model. Exhibit 13 describes the basic repertoire of workshop activities employed by the traveling troupe.

EXHIBIT 13. Improvisational Workshop Activities

Signature Motion
In a circle, each person chooses an action that represents how she/he feels at the moment. Singly, members enter the circle, state their names, and perform their action. The other group members repeat together this action and the person's name.
Mirror Activity
Group divides into pairs, with one partner designated as A, the other as B. As the pair stands facing each other, the A begins by making slow, gentle motions with her/his hands, which are mirrored by the B. These motions may increase in difficulty as the partners become more comfortable with each other. At the facilitator's signal, B slowly and subtly assumes the lead.
Simultaneous Talking and Listening
Pairs each choose a topic on which to speak for approximately 2-3 minutes. Both partners speak at the same time, trying to both talk and listen simultaneously. At the end of 3 minutes, the facilitator asks each member of the pair to repeat back what the other said.
Nursery Rhymes
Pairs work together to present a nursery rhyme or song, which are presented in genre such as opera, rap, and blues.
Single Word Coloring
Pairs of actors move to a central space; each partner is given a single word on a piece or paper. The actors are asked to repeat the words to each other, trying to put as many "emotional colors" in their speech as possible.
Scenario Building
Participants are divided into pairs or triads. They create scenes around a given, broad topic. After about 15 minutes, each group is asked to perform for the whole group.

Trainees. Improvisational workshops were presented at five of the eight sites across the nation where the Social Action Theater performed during the March 12 - August 24, 1993 grant period. Approximately 85 people attended the sessions after having attended the scenario presentations. Exhibit 14 profiles the 61 trainees who completed the workshop questionnaire. They represent all levels of adult basic education staff (in roughly the same proportions as those who responded to the scenario questionnaire), with experience that ranges from tutors of less than 6 months to veteran program directors with more than 20 years of experience in this field.

EXHIBIT 14. Profile of Improvisational Workshop Respondents

Job Status	Site					%
	Fall River MA	Minneapolis MN	Pittsburgh PA	Sturbridge MA	Knoxville TN	
Tutor	1	-	2	-	1	6%
Teacher	12	2	1	1	6	36%
Coordinator	2	0	1	1	8	19%
Director	1	1	2	4	2	16%
Counselor	2	-	-	3	-	8%
Other	1	2	2	1	3	15%
Total Individuals	19	4	8	10	20	100%

Heightened Sensitivity Toward Self and Others

The workshop evaluation questionnaire examined respondents' perceptions of personal growth resulting from the improvisational workshop training, particularly as regards sensitivity toward self and others and their understanding and appreciation of the power of verbal and non-verbal communication. As Exhibit 15 shows, questionnaire results indicated that the improvisational workshops were quite successful in raising trainees' communication sensitivities.

EXHIBIT 15. What Respondents Report They Learned About Sensitivity and Communication Skills From the Improvisational Workshops

	Not at All (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very Much So (5)
I became more aware of my own values, attitudes, and feelings during this session.	-	6%	17%	43%	34%
I feel as if I have a deeper understanding of the feelings and attitudes of others as a result of this session.	-	3%	5%	38%	54%
The techniques used in this workshop helped me gain a greater understanding of the power of verbal and non-verbal communication.	-	3%	4%	27%	66%

Value of Training in Improvisational Techniques

The workshop questionnaire also sought respondents' reactions to the experiential training, the perceived usefulness of these techniques for their own work, and the success of the facilitator in engaging participants. These questionnaire items and the results are displayed in Exhibit 16. Clearly, respondents valued the training experience afforded by the workshop activities and envisioned some type of application of the improvisational techniques to their own work responsibilities. Interestingly, many workshop respondents noted in the margins of their completed surveys that they "usually do not learn well in situations like this, but this was an exception."

Trainees' Expectations for the Workshop

Because research indicates that people learn better when they understand what they are about to undertake and freely choose to engage in the learning situation, the workshop

EXHIBIT 16. Respondents' Reactions to the Experiential Nature of the Improvisational Workshops

	Not at All (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very Much So (5)
I can imagine using improvisational techniques, like the ones employed in this session, in my own work.	-	5%	10%	31%	54%
Overall, I learn better from activities, like the ones presented in this session, than from other methods, such as lecture or discussion.	-	-	19%	28%	53%
The facilitator of this session was very good at getting everyone involved in the activities.	-	-	3%	4%	93%

questionnaire sought information about what trainees had expected to learn from the improvisational techniques workshop.

Respondents' open-ended comments clearly showed that while they were pleasantly surprised and well satisfied with the workshop, about 40% of them reported that they hadn't really been sure what to expect. A couple of their comments aptly capture this uncertainty:

> *"The session was a happy surprise for me. I had no idea what to expect."*
>
> *"I did not expect to be involved personally. I loved it!"*
>
> *"I thought we might be told how to present a scenario, but I had no idea I would actually learn acting methods."*

While many didn't know what to expect, another nearly 30% reported that they had expected to learn new staff development techniques or how to use improvisational or role playing methods in the classroom. Their comments included the following:

> *"I expected to learn how to use role-playing techniques with students and get them involved in acting out situations."*
>
> *"Warm-up techniques to get students involved with learning. I learned this and more!"*

"I hoped to learn enough skills to begin to try this with both adult students and teachers in my county."

"How to use skits in staff development training or in consciousness raising in the community; techniques to incorporate dramatization into training courses presented at staff training sessions."

"How to set up a scenario that will get across in a way that has punch, that people will remember; points we might want to make in a meeting."

"How to better deal with and resolve (find solutions for) conflicting attitudes and problems that may arise in class."

The remaining 30% of trainees reported that they had expected to learn more about theater techniques and related skills. Examples of their comments are as follows:

"How to come up with ideas, develop skits, and facilitate sessions."

"I thought I would learn how you did all of this, more of an informational session."

"I wasn't sure what to expect, but I thought I would get direction on beginning a theater group."

"I thought I would learn how to role play and use other techniques to get people to communicate."

Acquisition of Skills for Utilizing Improvisational Techniques

The workshop questionnaire asked trainees to identify what new skill(s) or knowledge they thought they had gained from the sessions. About one-fourth of the respondents said that they had learned the value of dealing with crisis situations or difficult issues by using theater techniques. For example:

"It showed me the power of drama to expose all aspects of situations we deal with regularly, and to get people to discuss controversies."

"I obtained a lot of information on problem solving and conflict resolution and how to resolve issues between people."

"I realize how well a short skit can get complex problems and ideas across, and how it encourages dialogue over topics that people are usually afraid to discuss."

Another one-fourth of the group reported that they had gained the insight that they could use these new techniques to teach adult students to express their feelings and interact with one another. Among their comments were the following:

> *"These activities promoted greater awareness and appreciation for 'acting.' Many of these ice breakers and movement exercises can help build trust and respect for a team."*
>
> *"It opened my eyes to the power that performance has in terms of getting people interested and engaged, of getting them to be open to issues."*
>
> *"The whole thing was a wonderful surprise. I felt like I attended (and participated in) a drama festival!"*
>
> *"It was a great way to get at the clarification of attitudes and beliefs. A good way to get people to warm up and share ideas."*

Many others reported that they had gained a sense of confidence in themselves and their ability to use these techniques. For instance, several said they felt smarter and more confident:

> *"I feel smarter now."*
>
> *"I gained some beginning skills in theater and some confidence in my ability to try it. For a somewhat shy person, the gradual build-up of exercises was critical. Thank you!"*
>
> *"I have more confidence in trying 'new' approaches."*
>
> *"I increased my confidence. I did things I wouldn't normally do. I said things that I wouldn't normally say."*

While most respondents reported gaining an appreciation for the methods and techniques along with a sense of confidence in their ability to express their ideas and opinions, only about 10% reported feeling surer about their ability to implement improvisational techniques aimed at awareness and social change. Overall, then, trainees found the workshops a personally satisfying, empowering, creative experience rather than forums for learning "how to."

As Exhibit 17 shows, after participating in the Northern New England Social Action Theater performances and the improvisational techniques workshop, only about half of the respondents felt confident that they had acquired sufficient skills to develop and use Social Action

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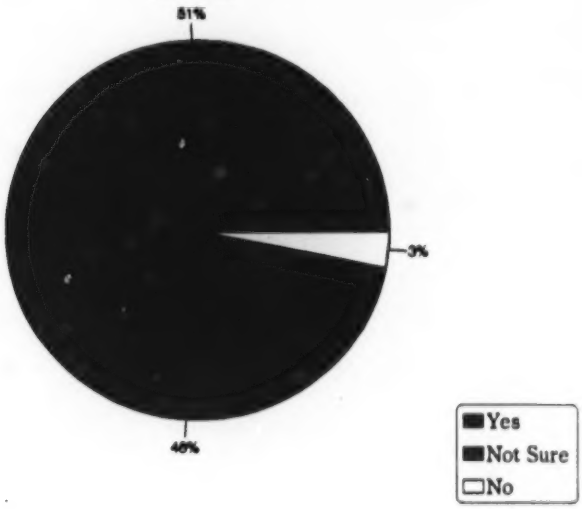
Theater approaches in their own work. On the other hand, only 3% (2 individuals) were certain they had not acquired sufficient skills.

Exhibit 17. **Workshop Trainees' Perceptions That They Had Acquired Sufficient Social Action Theater Skills (N = 63)**



(Questionnaire Item 9)

When asked about other kinds of training or technical assistance that might help them feel more confident in developing and using Social Action Theater approaches, about half of the workshop respondents said that they needed to know more specifics. For example, they frequently mentioned discrete pieces of the improvisational process, such as "scenario building," "facilitation," "more work in how to do critique sessions," "the use of props," "character portrayal," "how to create dramatic scenes," "dramatic structure," and "storytelling."

The other half felt they needed more of the same kind of training they had just received—more practice, more books or materials on how to do this kind of activity, and more time to practice and perfect these skills. Furthermore, they perceived a need for more training in how to engage all kinds of people in these activities, including shy, reluctant, and/or second language learners.

General Comments/Suggestions From Trainees

Finally, like the scenario questionnaire, the workshop instrument invited respondents to provide "any other comments that might help improve training in Social Action Theater." And, like the scenario respondents, workshop trainees' comments were highly laudatory. Several were also anxious for the opportunity to participate in more narrowly focused, skill-specific training in the use of theater techniques in their adult education work. Examples of respondents' comments:

"Very enjoyable. Would like to work on this for development in our program."

"You are definitely on target."

"Conduct a day at Network '93 please! You were all wonderful."

"Include ESL and LEP's; don't just focus on GED students, etc."

"Liked the continuity/direction that the facilitator gives to the whole role playing process."

"I am really impressed with your work—both your improvisations and your workshop. I would love to have more training in 'social action theater.' It offers many possibilities, not just for literacy programs but also for others in which I am involved."

"Basically, I hope you can do more of those presentations. 'A picture is worth a thousand words' has been broadened! Drama really does get through to you! It helps us to look at ourselves as few other techniques can!"

"Need a full-day workshop to allow more time for developing scenarios and to learn to work as facilitators."

"Talk about exactly how we can use this technique in our classrooms. I'm more aware—but now what?"

"I believe this was probably the most interesting and motivating professional experience I have had in a long time.

"I was impressed with how well run the workshop was—your timing was perfect, and the time went by so quickly. It was a lot of fun. and all participants seemed comfortable in what may have been an otherwise uncomfortable medium."

"Great theater—esp. Saturday a.m.'s skits, and a great educational tool."

"Wow! It gave me such a different impact! Thanks!!"

"Fantastic. Invigorating."

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

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IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several broad conclusions emerge from this evaluation of the Northern New England Social Action Theater's scenario performances and improvisational workshops. More specifically, evaluation findings point to the following:

1. **Interest and engagement of trainees**. Nearly all participants in the scenario presentations and improvisational workshops were interested, pleased, and satisfied with the trainings presented by The Northern New England Social Action Theater group.

   The Northern New England Social Action Theater group was successful in engaging participants in the interactive discussions that followed the scenarios and in the improvisational activities that took place during the workshops. Even trainees who initially felt reluctant to engage in interactive activities reported feeling at ease and engaged in this workshop.

   The Northern New England Social Action Theater group was particularly effective in getting scenario and workshop trainees not only to value the improvisational processes, but also to feel confident in their own ability to express themselves and adapt some of the techniques to their own work.

2. **Importance and relevance of topics and methods**. The Northern New England Social Action Theater group consistently presented scenarios depicting timely and important issues in the field of adult basic education. By tailoring the issues and messages in the scenarios to the specific communities/audiences, the traveling troupe was particularly successful in providing training relevant to the immediate needs of local adult educators.

Nearly all participants thought the Northern New England Social Action Theater effectively stimulated and managed audience participation. While a few trainees called for closer direction of the discussions, the overwhelming majority praised the discussions of controversial issues that followed the scenarios, noting that the facilitated dialogues allowed them to voice opinions, deal with contrasting viewpoints, and arrive at reasonable solutions to problems.

The improvisational workshops, in particular, were successful in imparting to trainees the importance and efficacy of using theater techniques in their work. Many trainees, for example, thought they could use some of these techniques in classroom or staff development (albeit in informal role-playing ways rather than the formal skit mode), to diffuse conflict, solve problems, make decisions, create empathy, increase interpersonal communication, explore controversial issues, and promote students' integration into a new culture.

3. <u>Effectiveness of the trainings in meeting their intended goals</u>. The Northern New England Social Action Theater was successful in conveying new information and skills to trainees, as well as changing their attitudes and breaking down some of the stereotypes associated with the adult populations they serve. Questionnaire respondents' descriptions of what they learned from the scenario presentations and improvisational workshops portray the touring group's resounding effectiveness in building adult educators' awareness of the social issues that affect learning.

It is important to emphasize that much of what respondents said they gained from the trainings goes farther than improved awareness of important issues. For example, many reported that they gained insights into how to successfully interact with students, manage conflict, and solve problems. Indeed,

drawing from participants' portrayals of what they learned from the training events, we conclude that the Northern New England Social Action Theater successfully facilitated participants' reflective thinking about their own attitudes and behaviors and how students may perceive the learning environment, and stimulated trainees to consider useful corrective actions, such as improved staff behaviors, teaching strategies that incorporate the everyday realities of students and help them build better coping skills, and policies or procedures that are more respectful and responsive to students' needs.

Thus, the change in adult educators' attitudes brought about by their exposure and participatory involvement with the Northern New England Social Action Theater trainings may indeed be more important and enduring—and have a more significant impact on students served in ABE programs—than the troupe's intended goal of skill-building in the use of improvisational theater.

Indeed, the Northern New England Social Action Theater group may be overly ambitious in its goal to enable participants to put together a scenario production after trainings of this design and short duration. While the majority of workshop trainees valued the specific techniques they had learned during the 4-hour sessions (e.g., role playing, character portrayal, gesture, and movement), most did not leave confident in their ability to put together a full scenario production. More than half of the group expressed a need to have training of a longer duration (perhaps two days or a week), training that included more practice on such elements as character portrayal, scenario building, and discussion facilitation. Many trainees also expressed a need for follow-up materials or technical assistance that could help them construct and perform scenarios at their work sites.

4. **Usefulness of this training approach**. The Northern New England Social Action Theater promotes the application of skills to adult educators' work situations. Not only did questionnaire respondents report that they liked the scenarios and the discussions and found them intellectually stimulating, but also most of them perceived the usefulness of these kinds of activities for the classroom and outreach to the community.

For some trainees, however, the immediate application was somewhat less than obvious. Few foresaw an opportunity to use the full scenario techniques presented by the Northern New England Social Action Theater in their own public awareness/outreach sessions or in promoting adult basic education to local employers, educational institutions, and other community adult education stakeholders. Instead, most trainees saw the probable application of these improvisational techniques in role playing contexts, which require some but not all of the elements of full scenario production. In other words, it was largely discrete techniques, ideas, and strategies that the majority of trainees gained from the training events that are readily adaptable to their own situations and needs, rather than concrete "how to" skills necessary for the faithful replication of the Northern New England Social Action Theater's methods.

While the above conclusions will undoubtedly help inform future program improvement/ development for the Northern New England Social Action Theater, RMC Research would like to offer a few salient recommendations suggested by the evaluation findings:

5. **Focus on how these trainings apply to ABE program administration, teaching, and student learning.**. While the Northern New England Social Action

Theater scenarios addressed topics important to the field of adult basic education, many trainees recommended that the group's scenarios and/or discussions deal with issues that more directly impact on the classroom. Immediately relevant instructional issues, such as how to motivate students and keep them enrolled in learning programs, as well as multicultural classroom conflicts, were chief on their list of suggested topics.

Yet, by bringing scenario topics closer to the classroom—focusing more directly on the "how to's" of ABE administration and teaching—the Northern New England Social Action Theater runs the risk of lessening the attitudinal change currently being realized through the confronting of controversial social issues that focus more on communication, empathy, and understanding than prescriptions for the improvement of programs or practices. Identifying a few "how to" topics that lend themselves to development from an attitudinal change perspective (e.g., the multicultural classroom conflict topic suggested by many questionnaire respondents) and including them in the traveling group's standard repertoire might offer a good middle ground. By presenting one such topic at each site, this should ensure that all audience members leave fully satisfied that they have acquired new ideas or strategies for programmatic (rather than just personal) application.

6. Provide more direction to scenario discussions. Trainees saw the discussions that followed each scenario as very important. Many questionnaire respondents suggested that the facilitator focus more directly on the scenario issues during the discussions and work more consistently toward moving the audience to suggest and weigh various strategies and solutions for effectively addressing those issues within their own adult basic education programs and classrooms.

In other words, although facilitation was generally felt to be already strong, participants' comments showed that there is room for improvement: The facilitator needs to exert more direction, better manage outlying or distracting comments, focusing the discussion more clearly on problem solving and the application/ implementation of promising ideas/practices. This should help alleviate the problem (reported by several respondents) of particular audience members tending to dominate discussions, using this forum as an opportunity to vent grievances, or serving as the group's self-appointed pop psychologist. Improved direction that also standardly includes a brainstorming segment to explore the kinds of places, times, and settings in which trainees might apply ideas, strategies, or theater techniques (and particularly with students) could also satisfy those trainees who hoped for more direct linkage with ABE classrooms (see 5 above).

Many trainees suggested that the discussion period be extended, perhaps also to include work in small groups, which would enable participants to devise solutions to particularly vexing problems affecting their own worklives. While these respondents noted that they valued the scenarios highly, overall they preferred to have fewer scenarios and more time for discussion.

7. Improve and expand "nuts-and-bolts" training in the improvisational approach used by the Northern New England Social Action Theater. Trainees clearly need a workshop of longer duration and different content if they are to be able to replicate the touring group's full scenario productions at their own work sites. Whether this added component is offered at a few selected sites several times over the course of a year (like the current improvisational workshop) or is only presented at one or more national-level events, or whether it takes the

form of in-person workshops or a training video and accompanying manual, content needs to include (a) "how to" instruction on interactive facilitation (which is presently lacking) and (b) expanded opportunities to practice such skills as identifying and developing scenario ideas, writing scripts, and training and directing actors. This is what evaluation respondents said they want and need—and it's especially important because the experience of doing theater is far more powerful than watching it. For this reason, it is also imperative that scenario attendees need to be more actively encouraged/recruited to attend the improvisational workshops.

If the Northern New England Social Action Theater's actual intent is to disseminate their methods and equip local adult educators with the skills necessary for successfully creating their own scenarios and producing their own version of Social Action Theater, then the "nuts-and-bolts" component needs to be expanded. These workshops could then serve as an effective vehicle of dissemination, as the troupe's product is highly worthy of emulation and, at least in principle, quite replicable.

Trainees also expressed a need to go away with some kind of follow-up materials (preferably accompanied with illustrations) that not only provide more information about these theater techniques but also describe (much like a newsletter) other scenario groups that have been established elsewhere or innovative applications of theater techniques that other programs have successfully implemented. They want ongoing information about the uses of Social Action Theater and improvisational techniques for staff development and for outreach to businesses and the community, and they want to learn how others have expanded this approach to include use with adult students.

In addition, we recommend that the Northern New England Social Action Theater group establish (and publicize) a technical assistance effort that would systematically provide post-training follow-up assistance, answer questions by telephone or mail, and provide on-site consultation where necessary.

8. **Make certain that participants know what they're getting into when they come to scenario presentations and improvisational workshops.** Conference and meeting attendees need to come to both trainings prepared to participate, and they should hold reasonable expectations about what immediately applicable skills they may acquire from participation. Clearly written descriptions or summaries of the trainings need to be provided, and both kinds of events should start (and perhaps also end) with a brief review by presenters of the intended learning objectives/outcomes.

Improvisational workshop trainees, in particular, need to be made aware of the kinds of ideas and skills they can expect to take home from the workshop and at least some notion of the methods and activities that will be utilized during the training. Even though some potential trainees may be reluctant to join a workshop that requires intensive interaction and physical movement on their part, persons who come into such a learning situation, confused and unclear about the goals and methods, are handicapped in their ability to engage, grasp information quickly, and make application to their work setting.

We suggest that the Northern New England Social Action Theater group design a brochure or simple handout that highlights the activities of these workshops, emphasizes the everyday relevance of these activities for ABE educators, and attempts to alleviate fears of participation.

We further urge the Northern New England Social Action Theater to expend more effort on outreach and dissemination. An obvious strategy for outreach among adult educators includes making certain that information about this project gets included in ERIC and the Adult Learning and Literacy Clearinghouse (U.S. ED/OVAE). Particularly because of the funding available through the Section 353 Set-Aside to promote innovative projects and effective staff development, bringing this unique project to the attention of all state adult education administrators seems especially appropriate.

Relevant audiences outside the conventional adult education circles include the following: Even Start, family literacy initiatives, and national conferences of social sciences groups like the American Psychological Association and American Educational Research Association.

Making application to the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel (PEP) for inclusion in the National Diffusion Network (NDN) is another dissemination strategy. PEP validation, however, would require an ambitious evaluation that examines the change in attitudes and skills produced by these trainings, possibly entailing participant follow-up and comparing the Northern New England Social Action Theater approach with other staff development techniques. Although the evaluation effort would be significant, validation could result in federal monies (through NDN) for outreach and dissemination.

V. Epilogue

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V. EPILOGUE

One of the dilemmas in the field of adult education training is that the majority of adult educators are either part-time teachers or unpaid volunteer tutors, thus creating a high turnover rate and the necessity for frequent training and retraining (Sherman et al., 1991; NAEPDC, 1993). The field of adult education also lacks sophisticated techniques for delivering high quality training in a format that can accommodate new, inexperienced volunteers, the experienced K-12 teachers who are new to the field of adult education, and veteran teachers and administrators. These problems are complicated by the lack of a coherent research base in the field of adult literacy and a dissemination system to inform the field about important topics, curricula, techniques, or best practices in adult literacy education.

The research literature on adult education training consistently indicates that training services for adult education teachers and volunteer instructors should be responsive to their need to understand the unique learning needs and motivations of adult students and the important educational trends and shifts in policy within the field of adult education. Training should help adult educators develop sensitivity and an ability to deal with the socioeconomic needs of adults and the needs of adults with learning deficiencies. Studies have shown that using a practice-oriented approach and engaging participants in discussion during the training event leads to greater growth in learning and more evidence of carryover into practice (Sherman et al., 1991).

Theater as an Innovative Technique for ABE Staff Development

Improvisational and exploratory theater, puppetry, and mime have been powerful and dynamic tools for clarifying values, organizing, politicizing, educating, and developing individuals, groups, and communities in many cultures throughout history (Lewis & Kolb, 1986). Even though theater has a long-standing, well established history as a vehicle for promoting learning and effecting social and attitudinal change, theater techniques may be a rarity in adult education

training—not because such techniques are perceived to be inappropriate or ineffective, but because adult educators and human resource development trainers seldom have an opportunity to learn about or incorporate these strategies into their work environments.

Theater can enhance the development of knowledge and assist groups in realizing goals and solutions that might otherwise be unattainable: Theater can serve as a "safe" framework within which controversial issues are overlaid and discussed, feelings are vented and mended, attitudes are reshaped, and stereotypes are shattered. The theater process itself is thought to be effective because of its unique power to engage the emotions and vicariously afford individuals the opportunity to explore life and problems from others' perspectives while at the same time examining their own attitudes, biases, and understandings. Central to this use of theater processes is the role of the facilitator, who is charged with encouraging learners to discover principles, organize their ideas into increasingly higher-order generalizations, and relate the experience to real life in ways that foster learning.

Theater promotes active involvement, discussion, and participation, all crucial components in effective learning. A single hour of theater activity can yield major reorganization in cognitive as well as affective behavior, the kind of cost-effective training needed in adult basic education.

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APPENDICES

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix A

Scenario Presentation

Questionnaire

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND ADULT EDUCATION/SOCIAL ACTION THEATER PRESENTATION

AUDIENCE REACTION SURVEY

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1. Of the issues presented in scenarios today, which ones, in your opinion, represent the most important issues in your adult basic education work? **(CHECK NO MORE THAN THREE)**

   - ☐ a. **"All I need are two English courses"** - [Student Intake]
   - ☐ b. **"He needs me"** - [Domestic Violence]
   - ☐ c. **"It doesn't happen here"** - [Sexual Harassment]
   - ☐ d. **"You're looking at one"** - [AIDS]
   - ☐ e. **"This isn't my last stop"** - [Developmental Disabilities]
   - ☐ f. **"Screw the word problems"** - [Eviction]
   - ☐ g. **"I own the place"** - [Landlord/Tenant] *
   - ☐ h. **"Here's what we are going to do"** - [Funding Issues] **
   - ☐ i. **"I didn't know I would need this stuff"** - [Auto Repair Shop]
   - ☐ j. **"She's (he's) my student now"** - [Student Placement]
   - ☐ k. NONE of these issues are important to my work in adult basic education.

2. Which scenario challenged you the most to examine your own feelings and assumptions about issues affecting students and staff in adult education? **(CHECK ONLY ONE)**

   - ☐ a. "All I need are two English courses"
   - ☐ b. "He needs me"
   - ☐ c. "It doesn't happen here"
   - ☐ d. "You're looking at one"
   - ☐ e. "This isn't my last stop"
   - ☐ f. "Screw the word problems"
   - ☐ g. "I own the place"
   - ☐ h. "Here's what we are going to do"
   - ☐ i. "I didn't know I would need this stuff"
   - ☐ j. "She's (he's) my student now"
   - ☐ k. NONE of these challenged my feelings or assumptions.

3. What was it about the scenario you checked in Question 2 (above) that challenged you to examine your own feelings and assumptions?

4. Of the scenarios you viewed today, which one generated the most informative discussion for you? **(CHECK ONLY ONE)**

   - ☐ a. "All I need are two English courses"
   - ☐ b. "He needs me"
   - ☐ c. "It doesn't happen here"
   - ☐ d. "You're looking at one"
   - ☐ e. "This isn't my last stop"
   - ☐ f. "Screw the word problems"
   - ☐ g. "I own the place"
   - ☐ h. "Here's what we're going to do"
   - ☐ i. "I didn't know I would need this stuff"
   - ☐ j. "She's (he's) my student now"
   - ☐ k. None of these scenarios generated an informative discussion.

Changes In Scenario Presentations

* *g. "Landlord/Tenant" replaced "Workplace Literacy"*

** *h. "Funding Issues" replaced "Unemployment"*

(Please complete other side)

5. How successful was the facilitator in promoting the discussion? **(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)**

Totally Unsuccessful	Somewhat Unsuccessful	So So	Somewhat Successful	Very Successful
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

6. Overall, how effective is the Social Action Theater approach in probing serious and controversial issues in the field of adult learning? **(CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)**

Very Ineffective	Somewhat Ineffective	So So	Somewhat Effective	Very Effective
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

7. What influence, if any, will <u>what you learned in this session</u> have on your work in adult basic education?

8. Which topics would you <u>most like to see presented</u> in future scenarios? **(CHECK NO MORE THAN THREE)**

- ☐ Sexual Abuse
- ☐ Multicultural Conflicts
- ☐ Student confidentiality issues
- ☐ Fed/State/Local policy clashes
- ☐ Unemployment
- ☐ Bilingual/ESL issues
- ☐ Refugee Issues
- ☐ Homeless adults
- ☐ Family Literacy
- ☐ The concerns of pregnant students
- ☐ Child Care
- ☐ Student age and gender issues
- ☐ Student motivation to learn
- ☐ Other _____

9. Please provide any other comments or suggestions that might help strengthen the Social Action Theater performances.

10. We're interested in knowing something about the participants who attended this workshop. Please indicate your job title or current position _____

11. How many years have you been working in the field of adult basic education? _____

THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS EVALUATION FORM.

Appendix B

Improvisational

Workshop Questionnaire

Northern New England Social Action/Literacy Theater

Improvisational Techniques Workshop

Please circle the response that most nearly represents your reaction to each of the statements below.

		Not at All				Very Much So
1.	I became more aware of my own values, attitudes, and feelings during this session.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I can imagine using improvisational techniques, like the ones employed in this session, in my own work.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The techniques used in this workshop helped me gain a greater understanding of the power of verbal and non-verbal communication.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Overall, I learn better from activities, like the ones presented in this session, than from other methods, such as lecture or discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The facilitator of this session was very good at getting everyone involved in the activities.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I feel as if I have a deeper understanding of the feelings and attitudes of others as a result of this session.	1	2	3	4	5

7. What did you expect to learn in this improvisational techniques workshop?

8. What new skill(s) or knowledge have you gained from having attended this improvisational techniques workshop?

(Please complete other side)

9. After participating in the Social Action Theater performance and the Improvisational Techniques workshop, do you feel you have sufficient skills to develop and use Social Action Theater approaches in your own work?

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure**

10. What <u>other</u> kinds of training or technical assistance might help you feel more confident in developing and using these approaches? (e.g. training in facilitation, scenario building, character portrayal, etc.)

11. We would appreciate any other comments you might have to help us improve training in Social Action Theater.

12. We're interested in knowing something about you. Please indicate your job title or current position. _____

13. How many years have you been working in the field of adult education?____

14. We'd like to know more about the relevance of this kind of training to your life and work.

If you are willing to be telephone interviewed, please provide your name and phone number below.

_____

_____

THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS EVALUATION FORM

Appendix C

Instructions About Survey Administration

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND ADULT EDUCATION/SOCIAL ACTION THEATER

Site Management Sheet for Evaluation

Site: _____ **Date:** _____

I. Before Session

Please list scenarios to be presented today in order of presentation. Indicate the primary message intended in each scenario.

Scenario	Primary Message
#1	
#2	
#3	
#4	
#5	
#6	
#7	
#8	

II. Instructions for Administering the Evaluation Questionnaires

1. Introduce the evaluation instrument and impress upon participants the importance of getting their feedback and suggestions.

2. On Questionnaire #1 (Audience Reaction Survey), Question 1, please ask participants to write in the titles of any additional scenarios that were performed at this site. Please tell them the title of the scenario and the context cue (e.g. workplace literacy, sexual harassment).

3. Please estimate the size of the audience and indicate that number here ____.

4. Please note any unusual events that occurred during this session that might have influenced the outcome of this training event and/or place any other comments here.

5. Please clip this sheet to today's evaluation forms and send the packets immediately to the following address:

Dr. Kathleen J. Mackin
RMC Research Corporation
1000 Market Street
Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801

Appendix D

Performance Sites/ Dates Included in Study.

The Northern New England Social Action Theater

Schedule of Performances and Workshops for the National Literacy Institute Grant

April 28, 1993	Missouri Valley Adult Education Conference Minneapolis, MN 2 performances, 1 training workshop
April 29-30, 1993	Mountain Plains Adult Education Conference Albuquerque, NM 2 performances
June 7-9, 1993	Commission on Adult Basic Education National Conference New Oreans, LA 3 performances
June 11-12, 1993	Northeast Regional Adult Literacy Conference Pittsburgh, PA 1 performance, 1 workshop
July 9,10,11, 1993	Tennessee Adult Basic Education Staff Development Knoxville, TN 1 performance, 1 workshop
July 30, 1993	National Conference of State Adult Education Directors San Francisco, CA 1 performance
August 24, 1993	SABES Workshop Bristol Community College Fall River, MA 1 performance, 1 workshop
August 30, 1993	Adult Education Workshop Sturbridge, MA 2 performances, 1 workshop